

SPECIAL PRE-SEASON ADVISORY TO ALL IAABO BOARDS AND MEMBERS

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TO: TOM LOPES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
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SUBJECT: SPECIAL PRE-SEASON ADVISORY TO IAABO OFFICIALS

As preparations for a new season are underway, sports officials are dealing with many challenges, some familiar, some new. All require IAABO Boards and officials to pay special attention to several areas where legal exposures are present; and where legal rights need to be asserted by officials. All officials should bear in mind that incorrect handling of the situations discussed below can result in significant legal and personal consequences. Please request that local boards review each of the following five areas of concern with all officials prior to the beginning of the season. If there are remaining questions, please contact the IAABO office.

1. STUDENT-ATHLETE/COACH NATIONAL ANTHEM POSTURES.

Media reports from various areas have recounted several instances where high school game officials have reacted publicly to student-athletes and/or coaches kneeling in silent protest during the playing of the national anthem before a game. This fall, it was reported that two officials, at a pre-match meeting with coaches threatened to disqualify any players who did not demonstrate respect for the American flag or the national anthem. In another instance, an official observed a player kneeling during the anthem and proceeded to advise a coach that he was leaving the gym. In yet another game, after witnessing players kneeling during the anthem two officials left the field, leaving the 3 remaining officials, — allegedly not without verbalizing his objection to kneeling players and their coach. After the game, the media reported that the coach claimed that, before the game the Referee requested — on behalf of the officiating crew — that any player who might kneel remain in the locker room “to avoid any problems.” After the game, one of the departed officials eagerly gave media interviews where he was reported to have said the chain officials who were called off the sidelines to replace the two officials “...weren’t officially trained,” and added that if the kneeling players “weren’t happy in the U.S., they should leave the country.”

These embarrassing and untoward incidents should provide a cautionary tale for IAABO officials everywhere: IAABO Boards are requested to briefly review with all members a number of fundamental and well-established principles of officiating; so as to avoid situations where officials denigrate themselves, their fellow officials, and the game by abdicating their contractual and ethical responsibility to call the game to the best of their ability.

- a. Refusing to work a contracted game as a protest after arriving at a game site is not only a breach of a contract to officiate. Media statements identifying “offending” players and teams are even more unprofessional. Taken together, these actions are indicative of a lack of understanding of the basic obligations of a game official.
- b. An official needs to remember at all times the reason why he or she is in the gym or the field house in uniform.
- c. There is no provision in the NFHS or any other basketball rules code of which we are aware regarding

- penalties for kneeling during pre-game ceremonies.
- d. Officials may pontificate about honoring the flag and respect — however, failing to honor a contract, leaving two teams, family and friends, coaches and staff, and one’s officiating partners to ponder the fate of the game while the official calls attention to himself or herself — is evidence of dishonor and disrespect of everyone else in the venue.
 - e. Self-righteous and gratuitous comments regarding pre-game ceremonies, threats to penalize athletes for actions which do not violate the rules of the game, and denigration of athletes and team personnel in media statements also serve to destroy the mantle of impartiality on which all officials’ credibility depends.

2. **OFFICIATING THE CONCUSSION RULES**

Both the NFHS and NCAA rules codes provide for removal from the game of any player who exhibits a sign, symptom or behavior consistent with a concussion. The following mechanics are recommended.

BEFORE THE GAME

- A. Review Mechanics and Rule thoroughly
- B. Secure from each Coach name and title of "Appropriate Health Care Professional," if any, as defined by state association regulations. Note: NCAA officials will follow conference protocols.

INJURY MECHANICS - POTENTIAL CONCUSSION

- A. Beckon Coach/Medical personnel
- B. When directing removal of the student athlete use the language of the Rule
- C. Do NOT discuss cause of injury
- D. Do NOT converse with spectators or parents
- E. Partner should observe process while continuing to supervise court and players
- F. Record Removal of Player, Time of Substitution, and if at request of Coach or Official
- G. Also note if athlete injured or ill but not removed under the concussion rules.
- H. If official or anyone attending the injured player observes a sign, symptom or behavior consistent with concussion, player must come out. No debate, no exceptions.
- I. Do not permit player to be moved, except under direction of medical personnel

RETURN-TO-PLAY (RTP)

- A. Sound risk management practices dictate that officials clear Return-to-Play with the AHCP BEFORE PERMITTING SUBSTITUTION
- B. Note name and title of Health Care Professional and time of re-entry
- C. Partner(s) should observe process while continuing to supervise court and players

NOTE 1:

If there is no appropriate health care professional attending the team, the player may not return-to-play in the game.

NOTE 2:

In some states, the Rule has been modified by legislation and/or state association adoption to eliminate same day

return-to-play for a player removed under Rules 2-8-5 and 3-3-8. Under the modified rule, the player may not return-to-play the same day or evening. Under these circumstances, officials must deny any request for substitution that violates this rule. As these modifications are frequently revised, please contact your state association or board interpreter for modified-rule information.

NOTE 3:

In some states, the Rule has been modified to require written authorization from a designated appropriate health care professional for same day return-to-play. Written authorizations may sometimes be on a prescribed form. All written authorizations should be secured by Referee prior to return-to-play; and retained by Referee or submitted to appropriate authorities as per local or state association policy. In all cases, officials are advised to retain a copy of all return to play authorizations. As these modifications are frequently revised, please contact your state association or board interpreter for modified-rule information.

3. DISQUALIFICATION & TRASH TALKING MECHANICS

Some of our IAABO states interscholastic associations have in place important regulations regarding Rules 10-4-6 c and 10-5-1-d. It is important that all IAABO board interpreters remain aware of current state association policies regarding “Taunting and Baiting,” especially in states providing for enhanced penalties such as immediate ejection, for taunting/baiting an opponent via words or actions relating to race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, family, or other or similar actions. Officials should note that, whether or not enhanced penalties are indicated, taunting and baiting as described above must be penalized (See Note to R. 10-5-1-d) rather than warnings issued. While other disrespectful forms of bench conduct may be “minor” and a proper subject of a warning under the new R.4-48, officials need to recognize the differences above.

IAABO boards should also encourage diligent enforcement of state association procedure for reporting disqualifications that may result in suspensions. It is strongly recommended that, where possible, all DQ and termination of game reports be screened by the board involved prior to submission to the proper authorities. In those states where DQ reporting must be completed prior to the officials leaving the building, it is vitally important that officials be educated before the season starts as to the requirements to complete any required reports.

4. SPECTATORS & CROWD CONTROL

IAABO Boards are urged to continually educate officials regarding interactions with spectators before, during and after the game. The fundamental principle is

PRIMARY REASONS WHY IAABO OFFICIALS DO NOT ENGAGE SPECTATORS

IAABO officials have a job to do. That job does not include having a dialog on any call you make or don't make with those not directly involved in the game. When you respond to the barbs of a spectator, or worse, if you initiate interaction, you raise the onlooker to a peer status. Not only is that demeaning to you and your fellow officials, it is what the heckler wants. If no attention is paid to fans who flex their vocal chords, the hecklers' efforts are unsuccessful.

Dialog with fans violates all known officials' codes of mechanics and ethics. Bringing a spectator into your circle of conversations only serves to detract from your effectiveness and credibility as an official.

Should the discussion escalate into anger (it may not be a long trip), you will place yourself and those around you in a position of danger.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Many officials who are otherwise alert, competent and well-prepared for the task at hand do not react appropriately to spectators approaching or addressing them. Legal complications from speaking with spectators can and have borne costly and embarrassing consequences to officials and their associations.

ON & OFF COURT

Ignoring the comments of spectators off the court is as important as ignoring comments during the game. Officials who disregard mechanics in that area demean themselves and place their fellow officials as well as athletes and coaches at risk. Remember that what is sought by an abusive or argumentative fan is attention. It is within the official's power to deny that attention.

Finally, should a spectator act in a way that interferes with the administration of the game, get the site manager, security or other host personnel involved in dealing with the offender. Not only will you insulate yourself from potential safety and liability issues, you will be able to fully concentrate on the safety of the athletes and calling the game. That's why you are there in the first place!

END OF GAME MECHANICS

The appropriate mechanic at the conclusion of the game remains as follows:

- a. Officials will remove any lanyard or “Smitty” used to hold the whistle around the neck. The Referee will approve the final score, at which time all officials will promptly leave the court together and proceed directly to the locker room, at which time the door of the locker room will be closed and locked, if possible.
- b. In no case will officials remain on the court during any post-game handshake, demonstration, celebration or other activity (unless required to do so by contract or regulation). Nor will officials, under any circumstances, moderate or facilitate a post-game handshake.

And, speaking of the end of the game, below is the final item of legal concern for the upcoming season:

5. KNOWING WHEN “THE GAME IS OVER” - PERSONAL SAFETY OF STUDENT-ATHLETES AND OFFICIALS

A number of recent incidents have pointed up the need for officials to terminate a game — notably in instances where game management has failed to maintain a safe environment or interfered with the officials working the game.

Unfortunately, several of the incidents have involved situations that have placed officials in grave danger; or situations where officials are faced with a Hobson’s choice of continuing the game shorthanded or having to terminate. For example, officials have been

- Blindsided and knocked unconscious by student-athletes in the middle of the field in an attack

- commissioned by an assistant coach;
- Arrested and removed from the field in handcuffs by a local “sheriff” when asked to move his friends away from congregating at the sideline;
- Discharged at halftime of a televised basketball game at the request of a coach who had been penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct.

In each of these instances, the remaining officials continued to finish the game. When this happens, the reasoning offered is most often: “After all, the game is for the kids.” “The kids’ are the same kids whose parents would sue the officials in a heartbeat should an injury occur in a game officiated with a short crew. So, there’s a lesson here. Please share with your people. And, remember that, while state association regulations generally provide that premature termination of a game is to be a last resort, most state associations are cognizant of the fact that situations sometimes occur that present a clear and present threat to the safety of student-athletes, officials, staff and others in attendance.

Still, IAABO officials must be made aware of the proper mechanic when these unusual situations arise to recognize when they must declare the game to be over.

Please do not hesitate to contact IAABO or our office should there be any questions or requests for clarification.

Thank you.